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Judge Webster Steps Down

AS IN HIS nine previous years at the head of the FBI, William Webster, retiring after four years as head of the CIA, took over a troubled institution, brought in a full measure of probity and steadiness and largely restored public and congressional confidence in a sensitive agency where the demands of government and individual liberty easily collide. Considering the history and the pitfalls, it is no small achievement to have run these two demanding agencies and to have emerged with reputation not simply intact but strengthened.

Judge Webster served at CIA in daunting conditions. He was the second choice of the appointing president, Ronald Reagan, and he soon would be working for a president, George Bush, who was himself a former director of central intelligence and who had at his elbow in the White House Robert Gates, a CIA veteran who had been Mr. Reagan's first choice for the job. But after the freewheeling William Casey, whom Judge Webster succeeded, the evident White House priority was to remove the CIA from public controversy and to focus it on its appropriate tasks. Mr. Bush, inheriting Judge Webster at CIA, kept him on—and by all accounts kept

him clear of policy entanglements. There was plenty of the usual complaint about the quality of intelligence and blaming of the CIA for administration failures, the inevitable self-justifying leaks and counterleaks. An outsider cannot know who was right in these half-hidden disputes that mark every administration. But the consensus, even among those who would have preferred a more aggressive director or who faulted him on this ground and that, was that he did an exceptionally straightforward, conscientious, honest job.

If these are not scandalous or turbulent times at the CIA, however, they have their own particular demands. The world is changing, and there is a heavy requirement on the CIA to provide timely, relevant and quality advice to American policy makers in post-Cold War circumstances where new forces, regions and players demand tough scrutiny. In addition, some legislators are now intent on getting Congress deeper into matters of the CIA's budget and policies in the future. The next director's job is going to be an especially difficult one. And the challenges will be very different from those that Judge Webster faced when he came to office.